



# *Colchester Public Schools*

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February 25, 2022

Good Afternoon Staff, Families and Caregivers,

As many of you are aware, the state mandate for masks in schools is set to expire on February 28, 2022. When the mandate expires the decision on masking transfers to local school districts to determine their policies. After careful consideration, with input from the community, Chatham Health District, and the district's medical advisor, the Board of Education voted last night to move to a "mask optional" model for the district rather than a "mask required" model. In brief, starting on Monday, February 28th students and staff will have a choice whether or not to wear masks.

It is important to have a conversation with your students to ensure that they understand what your family's decision is on masks. It is also important that you emphasize in this conversation that all families, students and staff have this option and that everyone's decision should be respected. Please see the attached document that has some tips around how to speak to children and what they may be feeling about masks. We can think of this as progress as Covid transmission rates have dropped to a level where some experts feel it is okay to unmask, but we also need to remember that COVID19 is still around and still in our community and still poses a real risk to some individuals. My suggestion is for you to speak with your children about what is the right decision for you. We know that some students or staff will not be wearing a mask and other students or staff will continue to wear a mask. It is an individual choice, but we all must respect the decisions of others. We all have personal reasons for our decisions. Some students or staff may choose to not wear a mask because it is uncomfortable or irritating. Other students or staff may decide to continue to wear a mask because they are protecting themselves or a loved one at home.

Please note the following are still in effect in CPS:

- **Wearing masks on school buses is a federal order issued by the CDC and will be in place until further notice.** Please assist us with ensuring that your student is ready for the bus by having a mask and understanding that it must be worn during the bus ride.

Students will not be permitted to ride the bus without a mask, and families will be responsible for transportation.

- Current protocols for quarantine and isolation post-exposure or following a positive test have not changed. Students or staff who test positive for COVID-19 will still be isolated from school for 5 days from the onset of symptoms or 5 days after testing if asymptomatic. Students may return on day 6 if there are no symptoms and are required to wear a mask for days 6-10 or may remain in isolation for that period.
- The CT-DPH will retain the authority to impose a universal mask mandate if there is a local or state-wide need due to an outbreak.
- Administration will work in conjunction with Chatham HD and our district medical advisor to respond with mitigation strategies to any spikes or surges. The strategies include many that were previously in place, such as physical distancing and cohorting and can be implemented at the class, grade or school level.
- The Board of Education retains the authority to implement masks if a systemic spike or surge occurs. This decision will be made in consultation with administration, Chatham HD, and the district's medical advisor and will be made in a public meeting.
- The district will follow [CIAC guidelines for athletics](#).
- Students and staff should stay home if sick, particularly if experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- Parents/guardians shall notify the school as soon as they become aware that their child has tested positive for COVID-19.
- CPS has tests available, if your child is symptomatic, please reach out to your school nurse for testing kits.

Please continue to have your children bring a mask to school each day as there will still be some places where masks are required. For example, students must still wear a mask while riding on the bus. They may also need to wear a mask if you go to the nurse's office, and there may be other circumstances where a mask is required. So, please send a mask and prepare them to wear it in certain places.

We know that the past two years have been a difficult time for our students and their mental, physical and emotional well-being are a priority for us all. Each school and staff member will be monitoring students in the coming weeks for any issues. Please remind your child that they can reach out to any trusted adult or building administration if they need help.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their perseverance and support during this difficult time.

Regards,  
Jeffrey E. Burt  
Superintendent